

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



## THESIS

**PLUS ÇA CHANGE  
FRENCH NATO RAPPROCHEMENT**

by

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September, 1997

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FRENCH NATO RAPPROCHEMENT**

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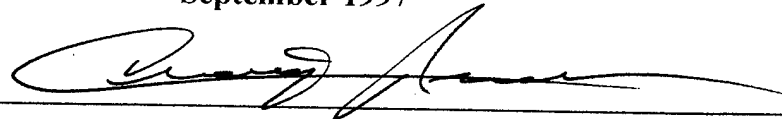
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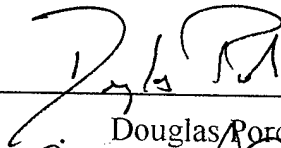
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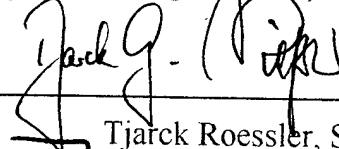


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## **ABSTRACT**

On December 5, 1995, the French government announced its decision to increase its level of participation in NATO. Although France was not rejoining the Alliance's integrated military structure, the French Foreign Minister would resume attending meetings of NATO's Military Committee in an official capacity. This decision broke with 30 years of French foreign policy begun by President Charles de Gaulle when he withdrew French forces from NATO in 1966.

Why has Paris changed its NATO policy? Officially, the French government stated that it wanted to take an active role in reforming the Alliance after the end of the Cold War and to strengthen the European contribution to North Atlantic security. However, while these were actual French foreign policy goals, achieving them was not the primary reason that France changed its NATO policy. Several events, including the Gulf War and the Bosnian conflict had revealed the weakness of the French military and its inability to carry out French foreign policy objectives. At the same time, the sluggish French economy prevented France from modernizing its forces. Faced with these realities, France had little choice but to expand its ties to NATO in the interest of its own national security.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On December 5, 1995, the French government announced its decision to establish closer ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This action broke with thirty years of French foreign policy that began in 1966 when Charles de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's integrated military structure. Beginning with an historical overview of French-NATO relations, this study seeks to determine why France changed its policy.

According to official government statements, France desired to play an active role in the process of reforming the Alliance after the end of the Cold War and to strengthen the European contribution to North Atlantic security. However, while these were official French policy goals, they were not the primary reasons that France adopted a new position toward NATO. Several other events that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union left France with little choice but to establish stronger foreign alliances in the interest of its own national security.

The most influential event was the Persian Gulf War. This conflict revealed the inefficacy of nuclear weapons, a cornerstone of France's military strategy, in the post Cold War era. It also demonstrated the limitations of the French military due to outdated weapons systems, a conscript force, and essentially nonexistent military intelligence. Despite its considerable military budget, France was unable to project power in a distant conventional war.

France's inability to influence foreign affairs was further exposed by the civil war in Bosnia. This was an opportunity for the French to regain a measure of credibility as a major power by dealing with an international incident in its own back yard. The decision by the U.S. government to initially not get involved in the conflict provided France with an ideal situation to assert itself as the leader of a united Europe that could deal with its own security problems without the aid and interference of the United States. However, France proved unable to get the European nations to agree upon a course of action and the hostilities in Bosnia continued until the United States finally intervened.

The poor performance of France in these two conflicts made it clear that its foreign and military policy had to be revised. However, economic constraints prevented France from modernizing and augmenting its forces sufficiently to maintain de Gaulle's legacy of independence. France had little choice but to reestablish ties with NATO. This action was not possible, though, until the final piece fell into place - the election of Jaques Chirac. Just as only Nixon could go to China, only a Gaullist was able to return *la France* to the alliance that had been rejected by the nation's savior.

The paper concludes with an assessing the extent to which France will reintegrate into the alliance's military structure, potential French contributions to NATO and how the U.S. government should respond to this new policy. Although the contribution of French military intelligence will very limited, its conventional forces will be a useful

asset in future low intensity conflicts such as the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia. Therefore, the U.S. should encourage closer ties between NATO and France, particularly in light of growing reluctance by U.S. citizens to place American soldiers in combat.



## I. INTRODUCTION

On December 5, 1995, Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette announced a new French policy toward NATO. Breaking with a 30-year-old Gaullist legacy, he stated that France intended to resume official attendance at meetings of NATO's Military Committee. In addition, French officers would also attend NATO's Defense College in Rome, the SHAPE Oberammergau College, and the Situation Center, while France would work toward improving relations with SHAPE. France's stated objective was to take an active role in reforming the Alliance, focusing on the development of the European defense pillar within the new structure of NATO.

This paper examines the events which led to this reversal of French policy toward NATO. It begins with an historical review of the development of French NATO policy. The review identifies the desire of France to reclaim its position as a world power after World War II and how Paris viewed the North Atlantic Alliance as a means to achieving this goal. It also examines the rationale behind de Gaulle's withdrawal from the Alliance's integrated military structure in 1966.

After tracing the historical development of French-NATO relations, the paper then turns to the question of why

France is now seeking closer ties with NATO. Going beyond official French claims of wanting to participate in the process of reforming the Alliance, the paper identifies several events that left the French government with little choice but to take a more active role in NATO if it wanted to participate in European security affairs. These events include the collapse of the Soviet Union, French military and intelligence deficiencies identified in the Gulf War, and Europe's inability to deal with the Bosnian conflict. These factors combined with failed French efforts to supplant NATO with the WEU as the leading institution of European security, shrinking defense budgets, and the potential for decreased American participation in European security to induce France to return to NATO in order to achieve its own security goals.

The final section argues that France's decision to expand its ties to NATO reflects a new sense of pragmatism in French foreign policy. Greater national security has become more important to Paris than maintaining an illusion of Gaullist grandeur. Finally, the paper recommends that the United States support the French decision. While the French contribution to the Alliance will be minimal in some areas such as military intelligence, the increased participation of French military forces in NATO operations

will help achieve an American foreign policy goal - improved  
burden sharing of European security.





## II. ORIGINS OF FRENCH NATO POLICY

### A. FRANCE AFTER WORLD WAR II

#### 1. A Nation in Ruins

While France emerged from World War II as one of the victors, its status as a major power was tenuous. It held a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and possessed the world's second largest empire.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite these factors, conditions within France prevented it from playing an active role in European and world affairs.

Politically, France was very unstable. General de Gaulle had been elected president of the provisional government, but he lacked support in the National Assembly. The Communist party emerged with the largest parliamentary bloc in the first national elections following the war,<sup>2</sup> a fact that disturbed other western nations. For while the Communists "accepted de Gaulle's leadership . . . [they] were loyal above all to Moscow."<sup>3</sup> The communists opposed de Gaulle's attempt to institute a new constitution built

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Young, Cold War Europe 1945-89 (London, New York, Melbourne, Auckland: Edward Arnold, a division of Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 79.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

around a strong president. They preferred a "weak Presidency and a strong one-chamber parliament, able to push through radical reforms."<sup>4</sup> Unable to overcome this resistance, de Gaulle resigned in January 1946, leaving France's six major political parties to deal with intractable postwar problems. This resulted in a series of short-lived coalition governments too weak to deal with those situations, the most difficult of which were the rebellions in France's overseas colonies. Indeed, the crisis in French civil-military relations caused by the Algerian War led to the Fourth Republic's ultimate demise.

Together with ministerial instability, France faced tremendous economic and social challenges. The physical ravages of the war had devastated the nation's economy - industry produced at one third of prewar levels, less than half of the rail system was functional and foreign trade was virtually nil.<sup>5</sup> Even greater damage, however, had been done to the nation's pride. The humiliation Nazi invasion and the collaboration of the Vichy government had severely tarnished France's international reputation and sense of pride.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 80.

## 2. National Objectives

French leaders of the Fourth Republic set out to reclaim France's lost international status with a three-pronged strategy. First, they sought to increase France's position by serving as an intermediary between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. The French saw themselves as a "moderating element indispensable to the equilibrium between the great blocs that [were] trying to divide the world between them."<sup>6</sup>

Growing Cold War tensions, however, made it increasingly difficult for France to continue this policy. Eventually, France opted for the western camp when, during the 1947 Moscow Conference, "French demands to separate the Saar from Germany were rejected by the Soviets but tolerated by the United States and Britain."<sup>7</sup> France further distanced France from the East when Prime Minister Paul Ramadier expelled the Communist Party from his coalition government on 5 May 1947.<sup>8</sup> A new strategy of gaining

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<sup>6</sup>Wynfred Joshua, French Attitudes Toward NATO (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1983), 13.

<sup>7</sup>Michael M. Harrison, The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 13. This was a tactical move on the part of the United States and Great Britain. France had tried to annex the same region in 1919, but was rebuffed by the Allies who stated they had not fought Germany so that French power could grow immeasurably. In 1947, the Soviet threat far outweighed any similar concerns for the Allies.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 13.

"equality with Britain as a privileged ally of the United States"<sup>9</sup> replaced that of playing intermediary between East and West as a means to achieve the first element of French strategy.

The second element of France's postwar strategy was to ensure French domination of Germany, both militarily and politically.<sup>10</sup> French sentiments were that Germany "does not have an army and must not have one. She has no arms and she shall have none."<sup>11</sup> Besides fearing another war should Germany rearm, France desired to keep Germany dependent to assure its own political and economic supremacy in Europe.

The final pillar of France's strategy for restored grandeur centered on maintaining control of its colonies. They were allegedly important for several reasons. First, France viewed its colonies as a key element of its economic recovery, claiming they provided raw materials and markets for French industries. More importantly, though, France believed that the colonies enhanced its image as a world power by, in effect, expanding French borders beyond Europe. Finally, powerful colonial interest, including

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Joshua, 21.

sections of the military, argued that maintaining their presence in the colonies was their duty. They were obligated, they said, to complete the "moral civilizing mission that enveloped a humanitarian mystique around French imperialism."<sup>12</sup> The Cold War enabled France to justify these imperialist aims under the guise of anti-communism.

## **B. NATO AND THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

### **1. A Means to an End**

While France struggled to resurrect itself, the western allies were trying to deal with the growing communist threat. Their primary concern was not the possibility of a Soviet invasion, but the procommunist movements that were gaining strength within the politically unstable nations of Europe. Rather than having a communist government come into power, the United States sought to help these nations recover from the war with a combination of economic aid and security guarantees. Reluctant to become entangled in European affairs, the U.S. favored financial assistance, believing that the appeal of communism would fade as national economies improved.

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<sup>12</sup>Harrison, 14-15.

Money alone, however, was not enough. Some form of security guarantee was needed to provide Europe with a sense of safety while the recovery process took hold. Thus, in 1949 the United States cast off its isolationist mantle and signed the North Atlantic Treaty, linking itself militarily with Canada and ten European nations. As tensions with the Soviet Union grew, this treaty became the foundation of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

A European-American alliance to oppose the Soviet threat fit well with French foreign policy objectives. In addition to providing protection, France saw the Alliance as a means to achieve its own nationalistic goals. The French expected to "receive acknowledged first rank within the Alliance . . . [gaining] primary responsibility for the global management of Western security interests."<sup>13</sup> In this manner, France would regain the international status it sought. Furthermore, the Alliance would enable France to "retain continental supremacy over the Germans and muster American support for French colonial policies."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Harrison, 12.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

## **2. Unfulfilled Expectations**

The Atlantic Alliance did not develop according to French desires, however. Internal instability stemming from political infighting prevented the French government from playing a significant role in forming NATO. While other western nations were discussing how to deal with the Soviet blockade of Berlin, four separate coalition governments dissolved and reformed within the National Assembly.<sup>15</sup> This political instability prevented France from developing a coherent foreign policy and taking a leading role within the Alliance.

The French were also unable to exploit NATO as a means to keep Germany dependent. Their desire to prevent German rearmament was undermined by growing cooperation in German-American relations. This was further complicated by NATO's military strategy. Fearing an invasion from the Soviet Union, NATO planners identified the need for increased conventional forces. Without greater conventional capabilities, NATO would have been forced to use nuclear weapons to counter such an invasion. The only possible source for the additional ground troops needed by NATO was West Germany. France strongly opposed this action, yet

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<sup>15</sup>Young, 87.



despite all its efforts, "Paris could not scuttle this most disagreeable enterprise."<sup>16</sup> Eventually, "German rearmament became the explicit condition of an expanded American commitment in Europe."<sup>17</sup>

The only area in which French policy aims benefitted from NATO membership was in its colonial struggles. France received extensive military aid from the United States in support of the war in Indochina. Although the U.S. financed much of the Indochina war, American foreign policy goals conflicted with those of France, which eventually strained Franco-American relations further.

French colonial possessions were a mixed blessing at best. While some in France argued that the empire provided credibility to French claims of world power status, that status increasingly came at a huge price. In 1950, the war in Indochina was consuming 40 to 45 percent of the nation's defense budgets.<sup>18</sup> Much of this funding was aid from the United States. "By early 1953, the United States was paying as much as one-half the costs of the war. . . ."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 38.

Divergent objectives accompanied American aid, however. Where the French wished to maintain Indochina as a colony, the United States wanted to strengthen an independent Vietnam, free from French control as well as Communism.<sup>20</sup> This conflict of interests came to a head when Washington refused to intervene militarily to rescue French forces at Dien-Bien-Phu. That defeat precipitated a French withdrawal from Indochina and led France to question the value of American security guarantees for the first time.

That belief was reinforced by the lack of Alliance support for French control of Algeria.<sup>21</sup> France argued that it was combating a *guerre révolutionnaire* in North Africa, defending NATO interests against Arab nationalism, a movement allegedly supported by international communism. It claimed that the Algerian rebellion was one manifestation of an overall "cryptocommunist enemy assisting in the effort to undermine the West's strategic position on the Mediterranean."<sup>22</sup> According to the French, they were actually doing the Alliance's dirty work. "Rather than

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>21</sup>Unlike its other overseas holdings, France considered Algeria to be a part of the French metropole, not a colony. It was specifically identified as a region under the protection of NATO in Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty until 1963 after it had become an independent nation.

<sup>22</sup>Harrison, 40.

luxuriating on the placid German front, France was spilling her blood in the more costly and less glamorous adventure in Algeria."<sup>23</sup>

The United States rejected this view, however, fearing that French action in northern Africa would drive nationalist Arabs into closer ties with the Communists. U.S. opposition to French military operations, first in the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, and then in Tunisia two years later, strained relations between the two countries and caused Paris to question the U.S. commitment to European security.<sup>24</sup>

The North Africa conflict also produced problems within France. The Algeria question so divided the nation that in 1958 it was on the verge of civil war. In the midst of this crisis, Charles de Gaulle returned as the only man who could reestablish coherence to French foreign and colonial policy.

To this point, the North Atlantic Alliance had proven to be much less useful than France had hoped. The security guarantees that the Alliance provided depended on the U.S. nuclear arsenal, and France questioned their protection.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>24</sup>During the Suez crisis, the Soviet Union threatened to attack Paris and London with nuclear weapons. Rather than countering with threats of its own against Soviet cities, the U.S. pressured France and Great Britain to withdraw its forces from Egypt.

After events such as the Suez Canal crisis and the Soviet launch of Sputnik, Paris doubted the United States government's willingness to risk American lives for those of its European allies.<sup>25</sup> The Alliance was equally disappointing as a vehicle to aid France to regain its national pride. Rather than enhancing France's status, NATO seemed to thwart French objectives at every turn.

Realistically, though, France had to blame its own policies for its lack of influence within NATO. What military strength it did have was being used in support of French overseas interests and not the Alliance's integrated military structure. This lack of participation prevented France from having a greater say in NATO affairs.

### **C. THE RETURN OF de GAULLE**

#### **1. Ideals of Independence and Glory**

Clearly, the roots of discord between France and NATO began long before the return of de Gaulle. However, unlike the leaders of the Fourth Republic, he provided the strong will necessary to unify France. He instituted a new

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<sup>25</sup>The Suez crisis demonstrated the central importance of nuclear weapons in world affairs during the Cold War. The nations with these weapons were able to dictate the actions of those without. This was a key event in France's decision to develop its own nuclear capability.

constitution that formed the Fifth Republic and created a government built around a strong president and a greatly curtailed parliament. He then set about the task of recapturing what one historian described as his ideal of French "independence and grandeur":

Independence and grandeur constitute the dual image permeating all of de Gaulle's references to France. It is nearly impossible to separate these two abstract and almost metaphysical concepts that are purported to be the very essence of France's identity and prerequisites for national self-esteem. Independence, however, seems to be the precondition for grandeur in that it frees France to seek her rightful place in the world. In the Gaullist lexicon, independence is an ideal signifying the absence of enduring and unyielding external restraints on France's freedom and ability to make policy choices in the national interest.<sup>26</sup>

To achieve this independence, de Gaulle adopted a posture of intransigence, claiming that weaker nations could not afford the "luxury" of compromise.<sup>27</sup> This meant no longer acquiescing to the demands of the U.S. in hope of gaining American support for French goals. Regardless of France's weakened condition, he demanded special treatment because of his perception of the nation's inherent greatness. For de Gaulle, "grandeur [was] secured when

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<sup>26</sup>Harrison, 49.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 52.

France receive[d] the homage of the world and her status [was] recognized and confirmed in the behavior of others."<sup>28</sup>

De Gaulle repeatedly identified the integrated military structure of NATO dominated by the U.S. as one of the main impediments to French independence. He argued that it deprived France of the right to determine its own foreign policy. American control of both major NATO commands - ACLANT and SHAPE - along with a U.S. general always holding the position of SACEUR, "meant that the most basic decisions about French security were taken without her participation as an equal."<sup>29</sup> He felt this forced France to depend too heavily on other nations for its defense and weakened the French military's sense of ultimate responsibility for national security.

In reality, while providing a convenient issue which allowed de Gaulle to criticize the Alliance, "integration" was more a myth than a substantial impediment to French control of her own defense. Despite the purported restrictions imposed by NATO, France freely deployed its forces in support of its overseas wars. One fourth of the French officer corps had served in Indochina. Then in 1954,

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 60.

instead of fulfilling its NATO commitments within Europe, France sent 400,000 troops that had been assigned to the alliance structure in West Germany and France to support 117,000 soldiers already fighting in North Africa.<sup>30</sup> By 1960, France only had a "token presence in NATO" consisting of 50,000 troops stationed in West Germany.<sup>31</sup>

## **2. Independent Nuclear Force**

Never one to be deterred by the facts, de Gaulle continued to pursue the elusive goal of independence. Nuclear weapons played a critical role in this undertaking. Initially, France had sought some form of control over American weapons, though with little success. French demands ranged from seeking "European" control of all U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe to French participation in any U.S. decision to use nuclear force anywhere in the world, except in cases of self defense.<sup>32</sup>

When these endeavors failed, France turned to developing its own nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup> Having such a force

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>33</sup>France had secretly discussed developing nuclear weapons with Germany during the Fourth Republic, but de Gaulle rejected this plan after he returned to office.

would return to France the responsibility for its own defense while also enhancing the nation's status as a world power. "Such an arsenal would allow the European nations to intervene in the new warfare with their own weapons, and would give them the possibility of recovering a role of first rank in the direction of the coalition."<sup>34</sup>

France detonated its first atomic bomb on 13 February 1960.<sup>35</sup> Following this event, French military strategy was quickly refocused around nuclear forces consisting of three types of delivery systems: Mirage IV bombers, land-based intermediate range ballistic missiles, and ballistic missile submarines. Development of these systems required tremendous cuts from the conventional military. From 1962 to 1967, the French army decreased by 43 percent.<sup>36</sup> Yet while the costs of obtaining a nuclear force were substantial, the overall cost of a nuclear defense program was considered cheaper and more effective in the long run than relying solely on conventional forces.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 122. This force reduction was the result of both the shift to a nuclear strategy and the end of the Algerian War.



### 3. Withdrawal from NATO

In conjunction with the creation of its own nuclear force, France gradually began to scale back its official links to NATO. In 1963, France withdrew its Atlantic fleet from Alliance authority.<sup>37</sup> Then in 1965, France refused to participate in Fallex '66, an exercise based on the proposed new NATO strategy of flexible response.<sup>38</sup> Initially, these actions had minimal impact on French-NATO relations. However, by 1965, as France continued to distance itself from the Alliance, Washington began to develop "contingency plans for defending Europe without a French contribution. .

. . ."39

This planning proved to be providential, for in early 1966, de Gaulle announced that "he had decided to modify the conditions governing France's participation in the Alliance. . . ."40 According to the new conditions, all French forces would no longer be available to NATO as of 01 July, 1966. The Alliance headquarters and all associated organizations,

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 139. The "Flexible Response" strategy, already adopted by the U.S., was based on the concept of employing the least force required to deter Soviet aggression instead of immediate nuclear retaliation. It placed more emphasis on conventional forces just as France was investing heavily in its nuclear strategy.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 143.

along with the foreign forces stationed in France were to be removed by 01 April, 1967.<sup>41</sup> Despite mixed reactions from the other allies, these target dates were met, and France was finally free from NATO's integrated military structure.

#### **D. FRENCH-NATO RELATIONS AFTER 1966**

Ironically, de Gaulle's partial withdrawal achieved the special status France had sought within the Alliance all along. Though no longer militarily integrated, France remained a member of NATO with representatives still participating in meetings of the North Atlantic Council and unofficially attending meetings of the Military Committee as "observers." And in reality, de Gaulle's strategy entailed very little risk for French security. The nation continued to benefit from the protection that the United States provided to the rest of NATO Europe without having to comply with any military force structure requirements.

The principles established by de Gaulle continued to shape French foreign policy long after his death in 1970. In 1972, these principles were summarized in an official government statement - The White Paper on National Defense. "It was based on all the notions of national primacy, *esprit*

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 145.

*de défense*, French exceptionalism, and the 'exclusive national' character that de Gaulle had taught."<sup>42</sup> This document served as the foundation of French defense policy throughout the remainder of the Cold War. The governments of Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand all maintained the separation from NATO's military structure that had been so critical to de Gaulle's view of French independence.

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<sup>42</sup>Philip H. Gordon, A Certain Idea of France, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 70.

### III. RAPPROCHEMENT

#### A. OFFICIALLY STATED REASONS AND OBJECTIVES

Given the strength of de Gaulle's legacy, why did France seek closer ties to NATO at the end of 1995? According to government statements, this decision was based on several factors, including the end of the Cold War, the need to reform the Alliance, and the opportunity to develop as stronger European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) within NATO.

First of all, French officials insisted that France was not actually "returning" to NATO, but was instead establishing ties with the leading post-Cold War European security institution. "The present Atlantic organization is not the same one [France] left under General de Gaulle."<sup>43</sup> The end of the Cold War had altered the balance of power within Europe and eliminated the Alliance's original *raison d'être* - collective defense against the Soviet threat.

NATO had responded to this shift in the political climate by reorienting its focus on a number of new

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<sup>43</sup>Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet, "Jacques Chirac Calls for Pragmatic European Defense Concept," Le Monde, 01 Feb, 1996, p. 3, FBIS.

missions. These new tasks included conducting peace keeping operations in support of the United Nations or the OSCE, such as the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia that was being formed at that time. The participation of French forces in IFOR and future operations necessitated that French military leaders take part in NATO strategy and planning meetings. In the words of one French official, "It would be unthinkable for our soldiers to be engaged in the field under allied command at a time when our minister of defense and our chief of the general staff would not participate in the decision making process within these Alliance bodies."<sup>44</sup>

Together with the desire to play a greater role in planning military operations, France also expressed its interest in being more actively involved in NATO's overall reform. In order to perform its new missions, Paris claims that the Alliance's military structure need to be changed. The existing chain of command, designed to conduct a total war, is considered "too heavy and rigid to respond with sufficient flexibility to the new, limited types of military

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<sup>44</sup>Pierre Lellouche, interviewed in "Why France has Reintegrated NATO," Jean-Gabriel Fredet, Le Nouvel Observateur, 3 Jan 96, pp. 30-31, FBIS.

operations . . ."<sup>45</sup> that NATO is undertaking. "Non-Article 5" missions such as peace keeping or humanitarian relief do not require the heavy command structure that still exists.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, in conjunction with reforming NATO, France stated that it was taking a more active role in order to establish a stronger European pillar within the Alliance. In his announcement, Foreign Minister de Charette said that "President Jacques Chirac made the decision to reinforce a 'European identity' within NATO and help adapt the alliance to post-Cold War realities."<sup>47</sup>

In particular, France is interested in developing the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept established in 1994 as the model for NATO reform. This new model provides for the use of NATO assets in operations in which all the Alliance nations do not participate. This specifically pertains to missions that the United States does not join. France has asserted that "command and staffing for a non-Article 5 military operation must largely be a function of the countries that [participate] in the operation rather

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<sup>45</sup>Robert P. Grant, "France's New Relationship with NATO," Survival, Spring 1996, vol. 38, no. 1, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup>Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty defines the original military missions of the Alliance which do not include conducting search and rescue or providing humanitarian aid.

<sup>47</sup>"Reversing De Gaulle, France Draws Closer to NATO," Associated Press, 5 Dec, 1995, Internet Nando.net/newsroom/ntn/world.

than of a pre-set, integrated command arrangement."<sup>48</sup> In those instances when the U.S. does not commit forces, the CJTF concept allows the nations involved to utilize NATO assets and take command of the operation. France views this as a tremendous opportunity for Europe to strengthen its own defense identity by being able to operate without U.S. oversight.

#### **B. UNDERLYING FORCES OF CHANGE**

These officially stated reasons for France's new policy toward NATO, however, do not fully explain France's changed policy. The end of the Cold War actually did little to improve French relations with NATO. Philip Gordon described the period from November 1989 to February 1991 as a missed "window of opportunity during which France might have greatly reduced its opposition to NATO integration and sought better military relations with the United States."<sup>49</sup> If anything, the reduced tensions between the East and the West led France to redouble its opposition to NATO's integrated military structure, contending that the diminished Soviet threat rendered it obsolete. "We are no

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<sup>48</sup>Grant, 67.

<sup>49</sup>Philip H. Gordon, A Certain Idea of France, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 165.

longer in the perspective of the third world war, where we had to prepare for a massive response to a relatively clearly identified massive attack. . . . A permanent integrated structure could only be justified in this perspective."<sup>50</sup> So while the end of the Cold War set the stage for a shift in France's NATO policy, it did not ensure that shift would be toward improved relations. It took the combined impact of several other events that followed the thawing of tensions between the east and the west to bring France back to the alliance.

#### **1. Revelations of the Gulf War**

The first event that led France to begin reevaluating its attitude toward NATO was the Gulf War of 1990-91. This conflict revealed severe weaknesses in the capabilities of the French military. First, conscription greatly restricted the number of French forces that could be assigned to the coalition. Because President Mitterrand remained faithful to a long tradition which reserved French conscripts for territorial defense, only 12,000 troops out of a French army 280,000 strong were sent.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Great Britain's

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>51</sup>Gordon, 181.



professional army of 160,000 provided 35,000 troops to the coalition.

The French also faced a tremendous logistical problem in transporting forces to the Gulf theater. Lacking any significant military sealift capacity, France had to employ several hundred military and civilian aircraft flights over a three week period to transport the small force.<sup>52</sup> Finally, when the French did arrive, their equipment was largely outdated and meshed badly with more advanced U.S. systems. Carrier-based Crusaders were deemed "inadequate for modern warfare," while Jaguars lacked the avionics necessary for night and all-weather operations.<sup>53</sup> Lack of technical capabilities limited the overall impact of these air forces. The French air force flew 1.2 percent of all allied sorties while the Daguet Division of light tanks had to be augmented by American artillery to be able to perform its mission of providing cover to the western flank of coalition forces. "[A]s with French air forces, French ground forces were assigned the only tasks they were deemed capable of accomplishing."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>David S. Yost, "France and the Gulf War of 1990-1991: Political-Military Lessons Learned," The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 16, No. 3, (September 1993): 345-346.

Perhaps even more telling, though, were the weaknesses revealed by the Gulf War in French military intelligence. Prior to the invasion, this weakness had been demonstrated when President Mitterrand received a briefing from the United States complete with satellite photos that revealed the Iraqi troop build up along the Kuwaiti border. However, when he asked to keep the photos for further analysis, his request was denied.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the Gulf conflict, France continued to depend heavily on the United States for such information. Defense Minister Pierre Joxe said after the war ended, "Without Allied intelligence support, we were almost blind."<sup>56</sup>

French forces in theater also lacked effective combat intelligence support. "[N]o combat intelligence arm [existed] in the French forces. . . . The French were so limited in staff personnel to deal with intelligence that they would have been utterly lost had the Americans not supplied them."<sup>57</sup> This weakness "exposed in all its

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<sup>55</sup> Douglas Porch, The French Secret Services, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) , 492.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. , 493.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. , 493.

nakedness the absurdity of France's ambitions to play the role of a great power."<sup>58</sup>

The fact that France had nuclear weapons could not compensate for outmoded conventional forces rendered even less effective by almost nonexistent military intelligence support. Without the means to keep track of developing world events, the French government could not effectively deploy its forces. Once in the field, the French military command also demonstrated the impact of insufficient intelligence support, being unable to participate in the coalition effort against Iraq without U.S. assistance. For France, the Gulf War demonstrated that trying to maintain its independence with a foreign policy based on incomplete intelligence was a very dangerous game to play.

Confronted with this reality, France began to recognize the need to revamp its military structure and instituted a vast overhaul of the entire system. This reform consisted of five main elements, including better crisis prediction and management, greater joint operational capabilities, and increased power projection.<sup>59</sup> These changes represented some of the most extensive reforms in the French military

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. , 491.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre Joxe, "The Future of the French Armed Forces," Le Figaro, (19 May, 1992).

since France began the development of nuclear forces. They did not, however, alter French relations with NATO.

## **2. Failures of the Western European Union**

Instead of turning to NATO, France looked to another organization as a means to compensate for its own military weaknesses. This organization was the Western European Union. Formed before NATO, the WEU had been an early attempt at European collective defense. Once the North Atlantic Treaty had been signed, though, the WEU faded into irrelevancy.

As the Cold War ended, France sought to expand the role of the WEU which had been revived in 1984. The Gulf War had shown the weakness of France's conventional military. Lacking the economic means to overcome this weakness on its own, France tried to find strength in numbers while still remaining free of American dominance. It proposed a plan to develop the WEU into a purely European defense organization with direct ties to the European Union. According to this plan, the WEU would eventually merge with the EU to become the military wing of this political and economic body. Eventually, France hoped that the WEU would replace NATO as the leading European security institution.

The French proposal received mixed reviews. Germany supported the idea of the WEU merging with the EU while Great Britain insisted that they remain separate. Many of the smaller nations in NATO, including the Netherlands and Portugal, balked at the idea of tampering with the status quo of having NATO at the head of European security. Their opposition was twofold. Economically, it made no sense to spend money on an organization that would at best duplicate the functions NATO already performed. At a more basic level, though, the smaller nations of Europe preferred "to entrust their security to the distant, powerful, and more disinterested United States . . . " than to an organization dominated by France and Germany.<sup>60</sup>

France's efforts to supplant NATO with the WEU began to unravel, however, in Bosnia. The U.S. had remained conspicuously absent from the early stages of the civil strife in Yugoslavia, content to let Europe deal with the problem in its own back yard. This would appear to have been the perfect opportunity for France to unify Europe and demonstrate the WEU's ability to serve as an alternative to NATO. Instead, the western European nations proved unable

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<sup>60</sup>Gordon, 173.

to agree on a policy or a course of action to control this latest conflict in the Balkans.

The civil war in Bosnia continued until the United States finally took action, first with the Dayton peace talks, and then as the defacto leader of NATO's IFOR. Once again, France's desire to play the role of a world leader exceeded its ability to convince other nations to follow. At the same time, NATO demonstrated its continued usefulness and ability to adapt to the new threats to European security. The Bosnian crisis "ended French dreams of building a separate 'European defense identity' and promoting the Western European Union as a rival to NATO."<sup>61</sup>

### **3. Threat of United States' Withdrawal**

The Bosnian experience affected French opinion about NATO in two ways. In addition to showing the Alliance's continued relevance, it also made France aware of the dangers of not having the United States actively involved in Europe.

Such a situation appeared to be increasingly possible. Domestic pressures for a peace dividend within the U.S. had produced large cuts in the American armed forces. These

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<sup>61</sup>J.A.C. Lewis, "France May Have Hidden Agenda in Retaking Seat at NATO Table," Jane's Defence Weekly, Jan 17, 1996, p. 17.

included the reduction from more than 300,000 troops stationed in Europe to about 100,000. Some members of Congress were even suggesting a complete withdrawal.

Perhaps surprisingly, such sentiments did not fulfill the ideal French vision for Europe. While France resented what it considered U.S. dominance of NATO, it did not want the U.S. presence eliminated. Indeed, "French leaders from across the political spectrum have come out clearly for an American presence on the continent. . . ." <sup>62</sup>

There were several reasons for France to want the U.S. to remain engaged in Europe. First, the end of the Cold War did not mean the end of threats to European security. Rising ethnic and religious tensions throughout Eastern European and northern Africa were creating an environment filled with dangers of its own. While the U.S. presence in NATO may have proved onerous at times, it nonetheless gave Europeans a sense of security.

In order to be able to face the new challenges of the post-Cold War era, France desired to gain access to American assets through NATO. Prior to the announcement of its new policy toward the Alliance, France had expressed this desire in the context of the WEU and CJTF. At the NATO Brussels

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<sup>62</sup>Gordon, 176.

summit in 1994, France proposed that NATO make the "collective assets of the Alliance available, on the basis of consultations in the North Atlantic Council, for WEU operations undertaken by the European Allies. . . ." <sup>63</sup> In particular, the European nations would be unable to conduct any extensive missions without the use of American aerial refueling aircraft, cargo ships and planes, intelligence and communications support. As its plans for the WEU to become an entity separate from NATO with access to those assets collapsed, France was forced to realize it could only achieve this goal from within the Alliance.

Finally, France wanted to keep the United States engaged in European affairs because of German reunification, the "most important factor in explaining recent French positions on European defense." <sup>64</sup> As mentioned before, following World War II France had fought German rearmament. When these efforts failed, France pursued strong bilateral ties with its neighbor, hoping to control the relationship. Unification upset this balance by making Germany the most powerful nation in Europe, and potentially, therefore, its new leader. The only western nation powerful enough to

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<sup>63</sup>Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "France and the WEU," NATO Review, Oct 1994, No. 5, Vol. 42, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup>Gordon, 175.



counter Germany's new strength is the U.S. Therefore, it has become an "avowed French goal . . . [to] ensure the U.S. presence in Germany and German presence in NATO."<sup>65</sup>

In each of these situations, French opposition to what it perceived as American dominance of European security affairs was overcome by a growing realization of the benefits that resulted from the U.S. presence. Ironically, the best means to ensure continued U.S. presence has been to support NATO.

#### **4. Economic Constraints**

Where the other factors already discussed demonstrated the need to change its defense policy, it was the weakness of France's economy that prevented Paris from maintaining its independence while making these reforms. From 1991 through 1996, the French economy averaged just over one percent annual growth. During that same period, unemployment rose from 9.4 to 12.7 percent.<sup>66</sup> The French government is under strong pressure to improve growth and reduce deficit spending, primarily in order to meet the

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<sup>65</sup>Gordon, 168.

<sup>66</sup>Roger Cohen, "For France, Sagging Self-Image and Esprit," The New York Times, 11 Feb, 1997, p. A-6.

requirements for European currency integration set by the Maastricht Treaty.

Under such constraints, France cannot afford to increase defense spending. In fact, it cannot even maintain its forces at post-Cold War levels. The most dramatic step taken to reduce military costs has been President Chirac's decision to end conscription. Conscripts had been a part of the French military since 1789, but they have become a liability, limiting France's ability to conduct military operations overseas. Chirac's proposal called for an all professional force of 350,000 troops, a reduction from more than 600,000. A study of the plan "estimated that the withdrawal of military conscription could save the country as much as 14 billion francs (2.8 billion dollars)."<sup>67</sup>

Chirac has also proposed privatizing much of the French defense industry and has taken steps to eliminate land based nuclear missiles.

In the light of such cuts in defense spending, it would have been impossible for France realistically to play the role of an independent world power. France has little choice but to seek an alliance with other nations to share these costs. The available options were limited, and the

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<sup>67</sup>"Chirac Announces End to Compulsory Conscription in France," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 28 May, 1996, LEXIS-NEXIS.

WEU's failure to gain greater prominence left NATO as the only game in town.

### **5. Election of Jacques Chirac**

While all these factors set the stage for French-NATO rapprochement, the final piece to the puzzle that made the new policy possible was the election of President Jacques Chirac. Just as only Nixon was able to go to China, it took "a neo-Gaullist . . . to convince the French that their security, and indeed that of Europe, [depended] on the Atlantic alliance."<sup>68</sup>

None of the administrations that followed de Gaulle before Chirac had departed from the Gaullist vision of French security. Early in his term, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing attempted some changes, trying to improve France's conventional capabilities. He argued that the threat of nuclear retaliation could not be invoked in response to every conflict that might arise. Instead, French forces should prepare to support France's allies to prevent a conventional conflict from escalating and spreading to France itself. His plans, however, resulted in heavy opposition. Closer cooperation with "allied forces seemed to suggest a willingness to bring France back into NATOS

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<sup>68</sup>"Burying the General," The Economist, 20 April, 1996, p. 39.

[sic] integrated commands and to make peacetime commitments to allies."<sup>69</sup> Faced with this opposition, Giscard's administration "was forced to retreat and to downplay the significance of the proposed changes."<sup>70</sup>

Even the socialist François Mitterrand, who had strongly opposed Gaullist defense policies in the early 1970's, embraced them as his own when he became President in 1981. His unwillingness to break with the legacy was most clearly illustrated in 1994 with the publication of a new White Paper, the first in 22 years. No longer constrained by Cold War pressures, Mitterrand had the perfect opportunity significantly to revise the French military doctrine in the light of the lessons learned from the Gulf War and, to a lesser extent, Bosnia. Yet while these lessons were reflected in the White Paper,<sup>71</sup> it made no substantial departures from the course set forth by General de Gaulle.

Instead, the White Paper alluded to France's continued separation from NATO, stating that the prime objective of

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<sup>69</sup>Gordon, 96.

<sup>70</sup>Gordon, 94.

<sup>71</sup>Two of the top three priority issues for new capabilities identified in the White Paper were improved intelligence support and greater power projection. Both of these were key weaknesses of the French military identified during the Gulf War. Livre Blanc sur la Défense - 1994, English Edition, Service d'Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées, pp. 66,70.

French military doctrine was to "ensure the *independence* [emphasis added] of the country and the defence of the nation's vital interests."<sup>72</sup> The document acknowledged that the Atlantic Alliance would continue to play a role in European affairs, but made no mention of closer French-NATO relations.

It was not until a political descendent of Charles de Gaulle was elected that his ideals of independence, which had become a cornerstone of the French concept of national greatness, could be altered. And even then, the new policy had to be qualified with the claim that France was not returning to NATO, but establishing relations with a fundamentally new organization.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid, p. I.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

##### A. A NEWLY DISCOVERED PRAGMATISM

How should France's new position regarding NATO be interpreted? Some analysts have suggested that it is merely an attempt to modify Gaullist strategies to fit post-Cold War Europe. They argue that, rather than adopting a new policy, Paris is trying to revive "de Gaulle's old idea of forming an inner leadership within the alliance. . . ." <sup>73</sup> This view, however, fails to recognize how significant a shift rapprochement is in French foreign and security policy.

Over the past thirty years, the Gaullist ideal of independence has become a foundational pillar of the French national identity. Therefore, returning to NATO's fold was a major step for the French government. They perceived this decision as sacrificing a certain degree of national sovereignty. Certainly, the other members of NATO would not consider this as a major sacrifice, but it is important to view the decision from the French perspective to fully understand its significance.

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<sup>73</sup>J.A.C. Lewis, "France May Have Hidden Agenda . . . ."

Developing closer ties to NATO was not France's first choice for its national security policy. However, the events described in the previous chapter left Paris with few other options if it wished to remain engaged in European security affairs. The fact that France was willing to give up what it considered a measure of independence in exchange for greater security demonstrated a new sense of pragmatism in French foreign policy.

Historically, France has tended to base its foreign policy decisions on preconceived notions of what it wanted to be true rather than reality. In developing its war plans prior to World War I, the French general staff insisted that an offensive strategy was the key to victory. They held to this belief despite intelligence reports that clearly showed the German army to be far stronger than the French.

France's colonial policy after World War II ignored the reality of decolonization that was going on throughout the rest of the world. France wanted to believe that it could retain control of its overseas holdings, and this belief nearly led to a military coup.

Perhaps the greatest example of French policy based on wishful thinking was de Gaulle's withdrawal from NATO's military structure. The sense of independence this move provided, combined with the development of the French

nuclear arsenal, led France sincerely to view itself as a powerful, independent actor on the Cold War stage. Once the bipolar order of the Cold War fell apart, however, France rudely discovered that it could no longer play that role, if indeed it truly ever had. So long as the threat had been well defined, France was able to focus its military strategy and planning against the Warsaw Pact, all the while benefiting from the protection it still received from the United States. New threats began to spring up with the end of the Cold War, though, and forced France to realize that it did not have the ability to meet these challenges on its own. In breaking with the Gaullist legacy, France let go of its illusion of independence and conceded the benefits of a continuing American military presence in Europe.

Looking back on French history, one could argue that this decision fit into a common pattern from which Gaullism was a departure. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, France joined with England, Russia, Prussia and Austria in a "concert" of European nations. While not a defensive alliance, this arrangement was nonetheless a supranational structure to which France subordinated its own desires in the interest of greater security.

Following the concert system, France continued to enter into other agreements. It formed an alliance with Russia in



1894 and later an entente combined with Great Britain. Following World War I, France strongly supported the League of Nations. Its failure led the French to turn to seek agreements with Belgium and Poland and then the Petite Entente with Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Unable to sustain these coalitions, France allied with Britain to oppose Hitler. Finally, after World War II, France joined the WEU and then NATO, the final links in a long chain of coalitions formed to preserve its national security.

This summary is neither all inclusive nor does it fully describe the unique circumstances surrounding each of these alliances. It is only meant to illustrate France's history of forming military alliances in order to compensate for its own defense limitations. In this light, French-NATO rapprochement renews a familiar pattern to which the Gaullist era was an exception. To discount France's new NATO policy as a rehash of Gaullism misses the mark. France's decision to build closer ties with NATO must instead be seen as a definite break with the past thirty years and a return to French tradition in the interest of greater national security.

## B. PREDICTED LEVEL OF INTEGRATION

How closely will France be willing to integrate its forces into NATO? Eventually, France should fully reintegrate into the Alliance's conventional military structure. It is highly unlikely, however, that the French will participate in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) or any body that could influence French nuclear policy.

Conventional force integration is necessary for France to have any affect on NATO policy. Just as the U.S. is the defacto leader of NATO because it contributes the largest amount of military support, France must commit its forces to gain any influence. "The half-hearted participation in NATO decision making bodies typical of Mitterrand's approach was counterproductive in terms of promoting French goals within the alliance."<sup>74</sup> France's new pragmatic approach toward NATO indicates that Paris has accepted the need to work within the Alliance structure to achieve its goals.

A major step toward integration occurred at the Berlin conference in June 1996. There the alliance adopted the CJTF model for NATO's new military structure. This opened the door for "the reintegration of French military units

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<sup>74</sup>Grant, 65.

into NATO operations."<sup>75</sup> The ability to abstain from certain operations had to ease French misgivings about surrendering too much control of its armed forces.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the potential to take command of operations in which the U.S. does not participate fits well with French desires to strengthen Europe's defense identity.

However, if France intends to command a non-U.S. led Task Force, it must reintegrate its forces. Before French command would be accepted by other European nations, French troops would have to be included in the operation. These troops would have to increase their level of training with other national forces. They would also need weapons systems that meet NATO standards in order to operate in a coalition environment. If they do not, "France risks falling behind in crucial new military technologies by prolonging its estrangement from NATO."<sup>77</sup> All of these factors point directly to the reintegration of conventional French military forces.

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<sup>75</sup>"NATO Updated," International Herald Tribune, June 06, 1996, Opinion Section, LEXIS-NEXIS.

<sup>76</sup>That Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty clearly states that NATO members are free to determine their level of participation in any Alliance action is something France has never seemed to grasp.

<sup>77</sup>"NATO Updated."

In contrast, it is highly unlikely that France will take part in any NATO activities that would affect French nuclear policy. Where the withdrawal of its conventional forces from NATO's integrated military command structure was a major pillar of the French ideal of independence, the *force de frappe* became the cornerstone. France's nuclear power status overshadowed the real weakness of the French military during the Cold War. It also justified France's otherwise weak claim to its permanent seat on the United Nations' Security Council. Having its own nuclear arsenal has become too closely linked to France's national identity to permit other nations to influence its policy.<sup>78</sup>

French refusal to submit its nuclear policy to NATO oversight is not an important issue, however. Neither the U.S. nor the Great Britain, the other nuclear nations in the Alliance, has ever surrendered control of their nuclear forces to NATO. The NPG develops plans to employ nuclear weapons as part of NATO's defense strategy, but it cannot order their use. This can only be done by the nation that owns the weapons. Realistically, there is no difference

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<sup>78</sup>Statements by the Chirac government that it would be willing to discuss extending its nuclear umbrella over other European nations do not conflict with this view. Those statements were made in conjunction with the final series of French nuclear tests and were an attempt to justify these tests in the context of overall European security. At no time did France suggest that it was willing share control of its nuclear weapons.

between the ultimate control the U.S. and U.K. exercise over their nuclear forces and that so closely guarded by the French. Thus, if France wishes to maintain the "independence" of its nuclear weapons, the decision will have very little effect on NATO security.

### **C. POTENTIAL FRENCH INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTIONS**

Beyond conventional military forces, what else will France contribute to NATO? In particular, what will be the French intelligence contribution to the Alliance? The French intelligence community has a long history, dating back to the sixteenth century. Regardless of this experience, however, the French are unlikely to provide any intelligence support of significance. Rather than aiding the French government, French intelligence efforts have often proven to be ineffective, even at times counterproductive, to the French political process:

The problem of intelligence services generally is that, though founded to 'reduce uncertainty', either they fail to do this or they often increase it. In this respect, the French secret services have conformed to the bureaucratic norm. That said, however, the generic problems which afflict all intelligence services have been accentuated in France. . . .<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Douglas Porch, "French Intelligence Culture: A Historical and Political Perspective," Intelligence and Survival, July 1995, p. 489.

France has an extensive intelligence structure. Similar to the Anglo-Saxon model, its agencies are divided between foreign and domestic threats. The lead foreign intelligence service is the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE). Unlike its American counterpart, the Central Intelligence Agency, the DGSE is dominated by the French military. The charter of the DGSE charges it "to seek and exploit intelligence advantageous to the security of France."<sup>80</sup> Additionally, the DGSE is authorized to carry out actions, as directed by the government, in support of French national security. During the Cold War, its primary collection efforts were focused against the Soviet Union. It also targeted terrorist organizations and collected economic intelligence. The end of the Cold War has brought greater emphasis to the latter categories.

France also has several domestic intelligence services. Primary responsibility for countering foreign espionage efforts and terrorist activities within France is assigned to the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST). Originally formed at the end of World War II to investigate

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<sup>80</sup>Jeffery T. Richelson, Foreign Intelligence Organizations, (Cambridge: Ballinger Co., 1988), 158.

those accused of collaborating with the Vichy government, the DST later shifted its focus to communist agents operating in France. In recent years, more of the DST's attention has been directed against the growing foreign population living in France, particularly Muslims from northern Africa.

French intelligence agencies also collect information on French citizens. The Renseignements Généraux (RG) reportedly has "a large informer network throughout France, with informers operating in every town and village."<sup>81</sup> With this network, the RG maintains files on millions of French citizens, from members of radical political parties to journalists and all teachers. The Renseignements Généraux de la Préfecture de Paris (RGPP) serves as a miniature version of the RG within the confines of Paris.

Yet despite its extensive nature, the French intelligence community does not have a strong performance record. The objective of any intelligence service should be to provide quality information to the government it serves to simplify the policy making process. Such has not been the case for France. For a number of reasons, the French

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<sup>81</sup>Richelson, 177.

government has often ignored, and at times, been embarrassed by its secret services.

One of the main reasons that France's political and military leaders have chosen to disregard intelligence reports is the previously mentioned conflict between reality and French desires. As was the case before World War I, such reports often revealed France's weakness and its inability to achieve its stated objectives. Rather than accepting such information, French leaders preferred to seek out reports that supported their plans. This led the French intelligence services to adjust their reports to fit the prevailing views. Another tactic was to present several options from which government officials could choose. If they chose poorly, the intelligence agencies could point to a different assessment and still claim success.

The organizational structure of the French intelligence community has further contributed to this problem. The French government does not have a single agency that coordinates the activities of various intelligence services and fuses their individual reports into a unified intelligence assessment.<sup>82</sup> Instead, each service operates

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<sup>82</sup>The Comité Inter-ministériel du Renseignement (CIR) was created to serve as a liaison between the French intelligence services and other government agencies, but it has proven to be ineffective.



with minimal cooperation, even at times in competition. This lack of coordination results in a fragmented intelligence picture that produces as many questions as it answers.

While the French government has not effectively incorporated its intelligence services in formulating policy, it has employed them in other ways. France has earned a reputation as one of the most aggressive nations in the pursuit of economic intelligence. According to Bill Gates, a former Director of Central Intelligence, "France is among a certain number of countries who have planted moles inside American firms, (who) steal American businessmen's briefcases and who carry out classic spying operations to obtain industrial and economic information."<sup>83</sup> France has targeted in particular new developments in military technology. This information is used to aid France's nationalized defense industry compete in the international arms market. As more traditional military threats have disappeared from the political scene, France has placed more emphasis on such activities, viewing economic security as a matter of national security.

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<sup>83</sup> Bill Schiller, "Spies Who Just Can't Come in From the Cold," The Toronto Star, 26 February, 1995, Final Edition, sec. A, p. 1. LEXIS-NEXIS

Government officials have also used domestic intelligence agencies such as the RG and RGPP for their own political ends. Phone taps have been used regularly to keep track of not only foreigners suspected of subversive actions, but also political rivals. In one recent case, Eduard Balladour, who at the time was the French Prime Minister and a Gaullist candidate for the French presidency, ordered wire taps against a judge investigating the illegal usage of campaign funds by the Gaullist Party. When this information gained extensive attention in the French press, Balladour justified his action as part of an effort to "prevent what he claimed was a massive CIA conspiracy to steal French technological and trade secrets."<sup>84</sup> Such activities would not be tolerated in other western nations, but have become accepted in France as a necessary means to the end of preserving national security.

The French government has also employed its secret services, often to its own regret, in conducting covert operations. The DGSE has a long tradition of covert operations tracing back to the French Resistance during World War II. This has been reenforced by the natural inclination of the military personnel in charge of the DGSE

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<sup>84</sup>Douglas Porch, "French Intelligence Culture," p. 503.

to use force as a means of problem solving. "Since its inception, the DGSE has engaged in . . . covert operations."<sup>85</sup>

The term "covert operation" has been applied to actions ranging from propaganda campaigns to assassinations. For France, the term has become synonymous with special military operations. During the 1950's, an element of the DGSE known as the Red Hand reportedly carried out several bombings against supporters of the Algerian independence movement.<sup>86</sup> Other similar actions included assassination plots against Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and attempts to foment coups against Moamar Qaddafi.

Such activities have become a common tool for the French government, often being used as a "substitute for an absence of viable policy or a coherent strategy."<sup>87</sup> Yet while direct action appears to offer immediate solutions to certain problems, taking such action has tended to produce even greater headaches for the French. In 1983, the DGSE placed a truck bomb next to the Iranian embassy in Beirut in response to an attack on a French military barracks that had

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<sup>85</sup>Richelson, 163.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>87</sup>Porch, "French Intelligence Culture," p. 500.

killed 58 soldiers. The bomb failed to go off, however, and was discovered. The Iranian government traced the truck back to its origin and filed an "embarrassing protest."<sup>88</sup>

Even more damaging than that failure, though, was the successful bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* in 1986. French operatives sank the ship with explosives to prevent the environmentalist group Greenpeace from protesting underground nuclear tests on Moruroa Island. The investigation of the bombing, which killed a member of the ship's crew, revealed the French connection, thus reenforcing the image of France's intelligence organizations having more zeal than competence.

Numerous attempts have been made to reform the French secret services. Early in his presidency, Georges Pompidou reportedly "contemplated shutting down the SDECE (predecessor to the DGSE) altogether and rebuilding it from scratch."<sup>89</sup> François Mitterrand pledged to abolish the agency as part of his election campaign in 1981. Though he failed to follow through with that promise, Mitterrand did manage to have the organization's name changed.

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid, 501.

<sup>89</sup>Porch, The French Secret Services, p 405.

The most recent reform efforts came after the Gulf War. In response to its complete dependence on the United States for military intelligence during that conflict, the French government took several steps intended to improve support to its forces. Pierre Joxe, the French Minister of Defense, consolidated the intelligence elements of the various military services into a single unit named the Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM). France also endeavored to greatly improve its technical collection capabilities. In 1994 France launched the Helios I, an optical imaging satellite intended to eliminate French dependence on the United States for satellite reconnaissance photos. Additional plans exist to develop other space-based collection platforms with other European nations.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the rhetoric and money that the French government has thrown at reforming its intelligence services, though, these efforts have been largely inconsequential. The DGSE has been able successfully to resist the appointment of civilians to senior leadership positions. Likewise, the military services have maintained

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<sup>90</sup>After the Gulf War, French Defense Minister Pierre Joxe stated that "France could not afford major intelligence satellite programmes alone but Germany, Britain, Spain and Italy could join Paris in developing satellites each nation could use for its own purposes." "French Defence Minister Calls for European Spy Satellite," The Reuter Library Report, 06 May, 1991, BC Cycle. LEXIS-NEXIS

their own intelligence structures despite the creation of the DRM. Instead of improving the intelligence service to the military, the DRM has become just another bureaucratic layer in the already Byzantine labyrinth of the French intelligence community. With regard to improvements in technical collection means, new capabilities will be meaningless without changes in the structure which they are intended to support.

Given the historically lackluster performance of the French intelligence services and their resistance to reform, it is highly unlikely that France will contribute significantly to NATO intelligence efforts. Its technical collection assets, while improving, do not compare with those of the United States which supplies the vast majority of NATO intelligence. Nor does NATO need the services of French special operations forces.

One area where France could contribute is in regard to North Africa. France has extensive economic and political ties with its former colonies. The French have also maintained intelligence contacts in the region which NATO lacks. However, in his article, "The Rise and Fall of France's Spymasters," Percy Kemp stated that France would not be "willing at all to co-operate with its Western

partners/rivals in intelligence operations . . . "<sup>91</sup> in North Africa. This assessment is accurate, provided the area remains relatively calm. NATO has shown little interest in becoming entangled in North African affairs. However, were the Maghreb to become unstable due to an Islamic revolution, NATO could become heavily involved. In light of the massive emigration that would ensue, even if the violence did not spread to Europe, Paris would likely become very willing indeed to share whatever information it had in the interest of its own security.

Short of such a direct threat, though, France will present NATO with more challenges than benefits with regard to intelligence. With few exceptions, the French will provide little in the way of useful information to the Alliance. Also, regardless of the creation of the DRM, the French will still require support to deliver intelligence to its forces that participate in NATO operations. Until France is able to improve the performance of its secret services for its own use, they will be useless to NATO.

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<sup>91</sup>Percy Kemp, "The Fall and Rise of France's Spymasters," Intelligence and Survival, January 1994, p. 17.

#### **D. RECOMMENDED U.S. POLICY**

The United States should support France's decision to develop closer ties with NATO. Opposing the move would accomplish nothing while reintegrating French forces into the Alliance will help achieve the U.S. goal greater burden sharing of European defense costs. At the same time, the U.S. must recognize that this burden sharing will be accompanied by changes in the upper levels of the Alliance command structure.

There is no reason for the U.S. to oppose French moves toward NATO. Such infighting would undermine the Alliance's new status as the leading security institution in Europe. Previous disagreements between the two nations should be put aside and rapprochement encouraged. The interests of the United States are better served by having France actively involved in NATO.

This is particularly true in the context of post-Cold War military downsizing. Domestic pressures and the lack of an immediate threat have led to large cutbacks in U.S. forces. The United States cannot play the role of the world's policeman and must work with other nations to maintain its security. This need for international security cooperation has become more essential with the growth of



American opposition to sending its forces into combat. The antiseptic image of the Gulf War has led American citizens to believe that wars can be won without casualties. As this sentiment increases, politicians will find it increasingly difficult to gain public support for involving U.S. troops in combat operations.

Such sentiment makes France a very valuable ally. The French have a much more utilitarian view of their armed forces. They readily employ their military in support of national interests and are more accepting of the ensuing casualties. France was one of the first nations to send troops to Bosnia as part of the United Nations Protection Force, and later the European Rapid Reaction Force. While participating in NATO'S IFOR in Bosnia, Paris deployed additional forces to quell an uprising in the Central African Republic. This willingness to make use of its military makes France a useful ally. The opportunity to contribute logistical support to NATO operations without sending combat troops is likely to appeal to American political leaders.

These same leaders must be prepared, however, to share power within the NATO command structure. France will rightfully expect more senior command positions in response to its military contributions. The French have already

requested to assume the command of Allied Forces Southern Europe. The United States has rejected this idea, however, as the post has been traditionally assigned to an American admiral. A proposal that the U.S. is more likely to support is a redefined role for the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander. Traditionally filled by a British general, under the new plan this position would rotate among the European members of NATO. The officer in the billet would also be the senior WEU military officer and would assume command of non-U.S. led CJTF's. Whether or not this will satisfy the French remains to be seen, but it might serve as a step in the right direction.

#### **E. SUMMARY**

Returning to the North Atlantic Alliance was not France's preferred course of action for its security policy. Both international and domestic events, however, left the French government with few options. Rejecting the emphasis de Gaulle placed on independence, France chose the more realistic course of action in the interest of national security. The United States should recognize the sense of sacrifice involved in this decision and encourage further cooperation with France. This cooperation will be needed to

meet the new challenges and threats the North Atlantic Treaty members will face in the post-Cold War era.

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